

## ***FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** Aug 2, 2012

**Agenda Item:** Marshall Cr. WMA Deer Cr. Addition

**Division:** Fish and Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Approval of Final Rule/Action

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

FWP proposes to purchase a contiguous 640-acre private parcel and add it to the adjacent Marshall Cr. WMA northwest of Seeley Lake. This parcel contains one of the last unprotected reaches (1.3 miles) of Deer Creek, which supports regionally important adfluvial and stream-resident bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout populations. The property is high quality big game habitat; important to lynx, grizzly bears and other wildlife species; and enjoyed by the recreating public year-round. Purchase of the property would secure and improve access to the WMA and other adjacent public lands.

The property would be purchased at its appraised value of \$1.28 million. All necessary funding is currently in-hand and was granted entirely by the USFWS Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Program, Milltown Bull Trout Mitigation Fund, Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust, and the Vital Ground Foundation. Upon purchase, the parcel would be included in and managed consistently with the Marshall Creek WMA.

### **Public Involvement and Process Results**

A draft environmental assessment, management plan, and socioeconomic assessment were released for public review from May 31-July 2, 2012; a public meeting was held in Seeley Lake on June 18. Thirteen public comments supported the proposal, and one other did not register support or opposition. No comments in opposition were received.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

If FWP does not purchase the parcel, Plum Creek Timber Co. (the current owner) will continue to actively offer it on the open market for private sale. FWP's environmental and socioeconomic analyses concluded that the purchase would significantly benefit fish and wildlife, public recreation, and local economies by maintaining resource-based recreation.

### **Agency Recommendation and Rationale**

As further described in the Decision Notice, FWP recommends approval by the FWP Commission for FWP to proceed with purchasing the subject 640-acre parcel and adding it to the adjacent Marshall Creek WMA. The purchase would permanently conserve critical fish and wildlife habitat, would maintain and enhance recreational access to and through the property, and has broad public support.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the commission approve FWP's acquisition of a 640 acre parcel in the Deer Creek watershed and its addition to the adjacent Marshall Creek Wildlife Management Area.